

In Memory of W.B. Yeats Summary

Writer: W. H. Auden | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Background

H. Auden wrote this poem after the death of the famous poet W. B. Yeats. Yeats passed away in 1939 during a cold winter. Auden admired Yeats and wanted to honor his memory. The poem talks about Yeats' death, how his poetry will live on, and the power of poetry in hard times. Auden shows respect for Yeats and believes poetry can heal people's hearts.

Summary

Part I - The Day of Death: Auden starts by describing the day Yeats died. It was winter, cold, and quiet. The world felt frozen, and it seemed as if everything stopped. Yeats' body was weak, and he lost control over himself. In death, he became part of his readers, and they started to shape his words in new ways. Auden says that when a poet dies, people see the poet's words differently. His poems now belong to those who read them.

Part II - The Role of Poetry: In this part, Auden talks directly to Yeats. He says Yeats was like everyone else, with faults and weaknesses, but his poetry lived on. Auden mentions how Ireland made Yeats write poetry because of its problems and madness. He also says that "poetry makes nothing happen." This means poetry does not change events, but it still matters. Poetry survives because it touches people's hearts. It is a way to understand life, even though it does not fix everything.

Part III - A Farewell and a Call for Hope: The last part is a farewell to Yeats. Auden asks the earth to take Yeats' body. He talks about how the world is filled with hate and sadness. But he asks Yeats to continue helping people with his poetry. Even after death, Yeats can still teach people through his poems. Auden believes poetry can bring healing, even in the hardest times.